

**Alison Wylie, *Thinking From Things: Essays in the Philosophy of Archaeology*
University of California Press, 2002**

ABSTRACT

Despite earthbound appearances, archaeology is a deeply philosophical discipline; in the course of their work archaeologists routinely confront provocative questions about how they know what they know. Their fragmentary data stand as evidence of the cultural past only given rich interpretation, which raises skeptical questions about whether it is ever possible to escape the trap of constructing the past in the image of a familiar present, or of an 'other' necessary to our own self-understanding. I argue that promising methodological responses to this conundrum have been obscured by polarized debate; although archaeological evidence is always an interpretive construct, it nonetheless has a striking capacity to subvert even our most strongly held convictions about the cultural past. The challenge is to give a systematic account of this perplexing epistemic duality; this is the task I take up, in various forms, in the essays that make up this book. In the process I argue the case for *amphibious* philosophy of science: conceptual analysis located at the interface between analytic philosophy of science and philosophically sophisticated archaeology, and motivated as much by problems that concern practitioners as by those that are canonical in philosophy, and that draws on the resources of the sciences themselves.

Thinking From Things begins with a substantive introduction, "Philosophy from the Ground Up," that traces the development of analytic philosophy of archaeology as a distinct subfield. The essays that make up the next section, "How New is the New Archaeology, and Other Historical Essays," appear for the first time in *Thinking From Things*, while those that make up the final two sections – "Interpretive Dilemmas" and "Reclaiming Empiricism" – are reprinted; they were interventions in the debates that shaped archaeological thinking about the prospects for instituting scientific modes of practice, on one hand, and the implications for practice of post-positivist philosophies of science, on the other. All of the reprinted essays have been revised, some quite substantially. This collection brings them together for the first time, making accessible in one place all the components of an extended analysis of archaeological evidence and inference.

Key words: archaeology; archaeological history theory; confirmation; constructionism; explanation; evidence; philosophy of science; post-positivism, naturalized philosophy of science; theory ladenness

One sentence abstract:

This is a book about how archaeologists know what they know: how they make use of fragmentary archaeological data as a record of our collective human history that has the capacity to challenge even our most deeply held convictions about the cultural past.

TABLE of CONTENTS

Preface

Section I. Introduction

Section II. How New is the New Archaeology, and Other Historical Essays

1. How New is the New Archaeology
2. The Typology Debate
3. The Conceptual Core of the New Archaeology
4. Emergent Tensions in the New Archaeology
5. Arguments for Scientific Realism
6. Between Philosophy and Archaeology

Section III. Interpretive Dilemmas: Crisis Arguments In The New Archaeology

7. The Interpretive Dilemma
8. Epistemological Issues Raised by Symbolic and Structuralist Archaeology
9. The Reaction Against Analogy

10. Putting Shakertown Back Together: Critical Theory in Archaeology
11. Archaeological Cables and Tacking: *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*

IV. Reclaiming Empiricism: On Being Empirical but not a 'Narrow Empiricist'

12. Heavily Decomposing Red Herrings: Middle Ground in the Anti/Post-Processualism Wars
13. Bootstrapping in the Un-Natural Sciences, Archaeology For Example
14. The Constitution of Archaeological Evidence: Gender Politics and Science
15. Rethinking Unity as a "Working Hypothesis" for Philosophy of Science: How Archaeologists Exploit the Disunities of Science
16. Unification and Convergence in Archaeological Explanation

V. Issues of Accountability

17. Ethical Dilemmas in Archaeological Practice: The (Trans)formation of Disciplinary Identity